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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001607

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SUBJECT: FARDC'S FIRST INTEGRATED ARMY BATTALION DEPLOYED TO ITURI

Classified By: Poloff Gons Nachman for Reasons 1.5 B and D

11. (U) Summary. The first battalion of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) was deployed to Ituri the week of August 16. MONUC views this initial deployment of 750 soldiers as a test of FARDC's commitment to support its soldiers. These soldiers will serve in peace-keeping support operations such as guarding installations. MONUC is cautiously optimistic that with appropriate guidance and support, this brigade will be able to make a positive difference in Ituri, although this remains to be seen. End Summary.

FARDC Deploys Battalion with Promises of Support

12. (C) Poloff met with Gerold Gerard, MONUC senior poloff August 24, to discuss deployment of the first battalion of FARDC's integrated brigade to Ituri during the week of August 16. The first 750 soldiers were deployed to Bunia with basic transportation equipment donated by Belgium, arms provided by the GDRC, and a promise to MONUC from General Kisempia, Chief of Staff of the Congolese Armed Forces, that FARDC would provide salaries to these soldiers on a regular basis.

MONUC Supports Deployment: Time to Test FARDC's Commitment

13. (C) Gerald said that MONUC was supportive of this initial deployment of FARDC's integrated brigade to Ituri. FARDC does not have the resources to deploy the second and third battalions of this brigade before November or December. This will give MONUC sufficient time to evaluate the performance of the first group of soldiers and the level of support provided by the GDRC. It will also free UN peace-keepers from simple static tasks like guarding the tribunals, the prison, and other facilities.

14. (C) According to Gerard, Ituri armed groups have said in the past that they did not want to negotiate with MONUC, but with a Congolese army. They have advocated for the presence of an unified army in Ituri and the reintegration of the district into the national territory. Now there is an integrated national army presence in Ituri as demanded, and a new district commissioner and local administrators appointed by the national government.

15. (C) Gerard noted that the first contingent of FARDC's brigade could also assist MONUC in providing security at transit sites for disarmament of militias under the demobilization and community reinsertion (DRC) program due to start September 1st. He said that fifty to sixty FARDC soldiers could be deployed to each of the five transit sites in Ituri to address security concerns by militias who are reluctant to disarm.

Obstacles to Disarmament in Ituri Remain

16. (C) Although MONUC is planning to inaugurate the DRC program in Ituri September 1st, serious obstacles remain. Militia leaders have expressed disappointment that none of them were included in a long list of military appointments and promotions recently enacted by the government. They have told MONUC that they feel that the GDRC has failed to follow through on its promises made earlier in the year in Kinshasa. Some of them now feel that they have less of an incentive to persuade their followers to participate in the disarmament program.

17. (C) In Gerard's view, the massacre of Banyamulenge refugees in Burundi will make it more difficult to convince Hemas from the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) and from the Party for the Unity and Safeguarding of the Integrity of Congo (PUSIC) to participate in disarmament. Hemas have expressed an affinity for Tutsis and some of them have pointed to this massacre as evidence of what could happen to them if they gave up their arms. Lendus on the other hand, feel protected by the arrival of FARDC's first battalion (Note: The commander of this first FARDC battalion is part of the former government's army (FAC) who was viewed as pro-Lendu. The second and third battalions of this brigade are commanded by members of the Rally for Congolese Democracy-Goma (RCD-G) and the National Liberation Movement (MLC) respectively. End Note.)

Comment

18. (C) MONUC has shifted its position on deployment of FARDC's integrated brigade to Ituri from initial opposition to cautious support. The first battalion deployed to Ituri has received the training necessary for the basic peace-keeping support operations it has been assigned as well as the necessary equipment. Additionally, MONUC has promised to guide them during this initial phase and help familiarize them with conditions in Ituri. The GDRC knows that the reputation of its armed forces rests on this brigade. If the government follows through on its promise to make regular salary payments to this initial contingent of its integrated brigade then there is reason for cautious optimism. This remains to be seen. The GDRC should also work to reassure the people of Ituri that FARDC's newly deployed integrated brigade will serve everyone in the district regardless of ethnicity.

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